

### WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of operating a counterflow cascade washer for wet-chemical treatment of a surface of a metal strip and to be located downstream of one of treatment means and aftertreatment means of a metal strip treating installation, with the counterflow cascade washer including a plurality of washer units each having means for connecting a respective washer unit with a fresh water supply and a rinsing water circuit, the method comprising the steps of branching a portion of a water flow, which circulates through a rinsing water circuit associated with each of the washer units, off in form of a bypass stream; and feeding the bypass stream to a washer unit located immediately upstream of a respective washer unit.

2. A method as set forth in claim 1, further comprising the step of dividing the branched bypass stream at an end of the immediately upstream washer unit and feeding the divided water stream to locations above and below the metal strip.

3. An apparatus for operating a counterflow cascade washer for wet-chemical treatment of a surface of a metal strip and to be located downstream of

one of treatment means and aftertreatment means and aftertreatment means of a metal strip treating installation, with the counterflow cascade washer including a plurality of washer units each having means for connecting a respective washer unit with a fresh water supply and a rinsing water circuit, the apparatus comprising a separate bypass conduit integrated into a rinsing water circuit associated with each of the washer units; and outlet means provided at an end of the bypass conduit for feeding a bypass stream to an end of a washer unit located immediately upstream of a respective washer unit.

4. An apparatus as set forth in claim 3, wherein the outlet means comprises blast pipes arrangeable above and below the metal strip.

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